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ABSTRACT

This review of current attitudes and procedures in the study of philology in graduate schools reveals problems contributing to a weakening of programs in classics and medieval studies. Departmental rivalry and compartmentalization of subject matter among philology, history, and social studies are severely criticized and serve as the stimulus for several proposals for change which are intended to lead to interdisciplinary programs and improved methodological approaches in the study of philology. The author argues that, as a methodology, philology must directly adapt to new needs and circumstances which involve the social sciences in order to maintain its own intellectual freedom. (RL)

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THE POVERTY OF PHILOLOGY: THE NEED FOR NEW DIRECTIONS IN CLASSICS AND MEDIEVAL STUDIES

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On 8th April 1777, Friedrich August Wolf startled the University of Göttingen by entering his name in the matriculation book as *studiosus philologiae.* Although philology, broadly speaking, had been cultivated in scholarly circles since the period of the Homeric allegories, Wolf was proposing himself for a relatively new subject which then possessed no faculty in German universities. He was advised to change his course to theology if he wished to find a post as a schoolmaster but he refused. At his interview with the rector of Göttingen, he claimed that he preferred the "greater intellectual freedom" [1] of his chosen field to more traditional disciplines. In the end, the university allowed Wolf to set and to follow his own course of study. The rest of the story belongs to the history of classical scholarship: Wolf revolutionized the study of his subject, established standards which became the norm throughout Europe, and invented the *seminarium* in philology for training classics masters for the schools.

Less than two hundred years after the German, French, and English pioneers introduced philology into the university curriculum, classics and medieval studies, two fields directly affected by its methodology, find themselves at a crossroads. Not that philology has ceased to provide answers to the problems it seeks to solve, but that modern culture has created a wholly new set of orientations around the social sciences. The introspection does not only trouble philology; it has caused serious questions to be asked in all the historical disciplines.

Communication between the historical and the social sciences has in general been prevented. The two sets of disciplines occupy different, sometimes rival, departments. Their separation, which has brought benefits as well as liabilities, dates from the nineteenth century. One of its chief causes was the natural suspicion of established fields for new sciences which, in the utopian visions of Comte and Marx, claimed all knowledge as their frontier. No such claims are

1. Cited in J. E. Sandys, *A Short History of Classical Scholarship* (Cambridge, 1915), p. 306.

heard today, but the unhappy and unwanted separation continues. As a result, gifted graduate students are often compelled to chose among mutually exclusive departmental alternatives. At times they make an early choice which then prevents them from pursuing the subject of their mature interests.

To add to the complications, the university inherits attitudes which have indirectly pushed students in the direction of the social sciences. For better or worse, our schools no longer adequately provide their pupils with the tools for serious historical research in ancient or medieval civilization. A student can easily begin training in the social sciences at the graduate level, but it is not easy to do so in Latin or Greek. Classics and medieval studies cannot be blamed for the changing goals of elementary education, but they have, until recently, done little to adapt to the new conditions. In one sense, therefore, through its conservatism, philology has helped to bring the problem on itself.

Helped, but not caused. There are a more important group of external factors affecting the present malaise of philology. The first of these is the widespread loss of interest in history, especially among people dealing with modern problems. Nowadays everyone makes a fanfare about the importance of history, but the growing, ahistorical nature of our intellectual environment is unmistakeable. An unconnected second cause is the increasing degree of frustration in classical philology with the lack of large and significant research subjects. More and more classicists seem to work on smaller and smaller problems of continually decreasing significance. Many classicists have turned to the Middle Ages, where there is no lack of fresh themes and texts. But the answer is not for classicists to become medievalists, for the abundance of research topics in medieval studies only conceals the fact that a similar inward directedness troubles that area. Thirdly, there is a very practical issue. If classical philology as a whole wanted to broaden its horizons, where would it find the time and money? It takes from three years up to train a classics professor after a good B.A. It sometimes takes even longer to train a medievalist. After such arduous labours, few students and fewer institutions are willing to prolong the state of pupillage. Furthermore, from the point of view of classics and medieval studies, a reversal of the present subordination of the social to the historical sciences would be disasterous. One can imagine a teacher of ancient history who knows no anthropology being unable to explain how the Roman family functioned. But can one envisage a teacher of ancient family institutions who knows nothing *but* modern anthropological theory? The problem obviously has many sides.

Before making some suggestions for change, one might pose a more fundamental question. Students today, particularly bright students, share with Friedrich Wolf a desire for a "greater intellectual freedom." Whenever student problems arise, freedom and radical change are key concepts. Why is this so?

One reason among many is surely the present compartmentalization of

knowledge in the university. In a recent analysis of the failures of graduate schools, two American sociologists made the following statement:

> American scholarship has been noteworthy for its ability to cut across disciplinary boundaries and bring together men with different sorts of knowledge to work on a single problem. But the graduate schools have been conspicuously slow to follow this lead and allow students to look at problems rather than disciplines. A discipline is nothing more than an administrative category . . . . New journals are founded every day to fill the interstices between disciplines and encourage cross-disciplinary contact and fertilization. But the instructional programme remains almost untouched. Faculty who want to teach subjects outside their department's traditional boundaries often find this difficult, and graduate students who want to pursue a pattern of studies that does not fall under conventional departmental definitions are likely to run into trouble.[2]

Criticism could go further than this. The departmental system of the modern university is a completely haphazard arrangement, a product of historical accident rather than design; its claim to represent the structure of knowledge at the present time or any other cannot seriously be maintained by anyone. The issue would not be so grave if departments were merely administrative categories and did not teach and embody distinctive methodologies for dealing with research subjects. There is however a conflict between different methodologies in the university and they have had no serious dialogue with each other for generations. For this reason, the methods of the traditional arts faculties, with few exceptions, have gradually grown out of touch with the progressively changing scientific forms of understanding in society; having done this, they no longer serve as creative innovators in dealing with the moral issues facing the modern world. Thus, the traditional fields no longer attract enough gifted students, no longer seem to deal with relevant problems. They badly need infusions of new ideas from the social sciences.

The departmental rigidity not only affects the structure of knowledge, but, inasmuch as they are professionals, the lives of individuals. People within the system who want to change it are not only unpopular; they are frequently ostracized. Any young professor knows instinctively that, in order to get ahead in the world, he should confine his agitation to finding new directions for various possibilities of development *within* the system. The professional's real obligation is to the group he serves, and any threat to the group as a whole may be construed as a threat to him personally. Furthermore, the professional's social role as an intellectual lies within a self-perpetuating constellation of men, ideas, and institutions, whose success, in the final analysis, is judged by its capacity to survive. Although he often combines his professional role with many others, a part of his function is to produce role ideology in classrooms, journals, and

2. Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, "Why Graduate Schools Fail," *The Atlantic*, vol. 221, No. 2 (February, 1968), pp. 51-52.

learned societies. If a teacher should suggest, in contrast, that the system itself is not really advancing human knowledge or solving significant problems he would, in effect, have committed a heresy, and the court of morality within the profession would not normally allow him to remain in an effective political position among the faithful. Since the professional organizations absolutely control appointments and advancements, they may act directly or indirectly as instruments of repression. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the entire complex of professionals, departments, and methodologies is passed from one generation to the next like an hereditary privilege.

Departments are not the only problem areas. Similar dilemmas face research institutes, even though they are normally free of departmental boundaries. A close look at some research institutes reveals that their interdisciplinary nature is more of an ideal than a reality. They are inevitably composed of men who are trained in departments, and who often remain spiritual or physical members of those departments after they join the institute. Often the term "interdisciplinary" in research institutions conceals the fact that the institute embodies an inflexible structure which, for political or sociological or religious reasons, lies outside the established and approved departmental boundaries. The last two decades have witnessed a proliferation of research institutes under a variety of titles. Frequently such groupings do not signify that the center for interdisciplinary studies will really provide cross-fertilization, but that new organization does not have (and may never have) the political power of a department. Centers and institutes have never successfully challenged the hegemony of departments in North American universities, and often they function best if they are totally independent of the university. This predicament is all the more curious if one recalls that departments like classics began, in effect, as centers, where people with different techniques and common interests pooled their resources for more effective programming and research. Today, however, the institute, even though it provides better conditions for research than a department, faces a similar problem. The structure of ideas which impels a research institute in classics, medieval studies, or history may not be spelled out like a department's courses, but it is implicit in the work the institute does or does not undertake. Choice of topic rather than methodology dictates the pattern, and if there is no real interchange among members of the research foundation, co-operation will not be achieved by printing "interdisciplinary" or a similar catchall on the stationery.

In view of such fundamental problems, is it any wonder that students in increasing numbers are looking for greater intellectual freedom outside the university?

Suggestions for change have come from a bewildering variety of quarters. The desire for change on the part of the students has often manifested itself in revolutionary form, but in their apocalyptic visions there appears to be no

realization that outdated structures have periodically troubled universities in the past. If we may be allowed the cautious optimism of thinking that any changes to be made should originate with the professors and the administration, perhaps it would be appropriate for this article to conclude with some brief, admittedly incomprehensive, proposals.

First, the problem of philology as an historical discipline might be framed more generally by two statements: on the one side, there is the microhistorical problem of the verifiability of propositions based on literary documents with no reference to the social system; on the other, the macrohistorical problem of discerning a meaningful pattern of sociocultural change from the empirical data. Ideally, the social sciences should contribute to the solution of this twofold difficulty by providing theoretical bases for historical disciplines. The real task would therefore seem to consist in building bridges between the two areas. The new links would be theoretical inasmuch as they implied a rethinking of the traditional division of the sciences, and practical inasmuch as they related directly to graduate training and productive research.

This article is not the place for a long discussion of the troubles besetting the inherited division of the sciences in our universities. It is worth noting, however, that historians are not the only ones to perceive the difficulties. Within the social sciences a substantial group of researchers are turning their interests towards problems which involve the time dimension. The need for continued work in this direction is underlined in a recent report to an international congress of sociologists:

> Though there has been much talk in recent years about the importance of history to sociology, it is perhaps not unfair to suggest that a good deal of this talk has come from sociologists who themselves have little or no history. It is fashionable to pretend an interest in history and so long as such an interest demands nothing more than making use of work already done by the historian it can be subscribed to at no great cost. The question has to be asked, however, whether a good many American sociologists have not become so unhistorical in their way of thinking, and in their methods of investigation, that, in turning to history, they find themselves unable . . . to make effective use of what history has to offer. In effect, the sociologist too often wants to use history without doing history.[3]

Could a similar statement not be made about historians who dabble in sociology?

3. S. D. Clark, "History and the Sociological Method," *Transactions of the Fifth World Congress of Sociology* (Louvain, 1964), vol. IV, p. 32.
Readers who wish to pursue this subject further are directed to the series of essays entitled "New Ways in History," *Times Literary Supplement*, No. 3,345 (7 April 1966), No. 3,361 (28 July 1966), and No. 3,367 (8 Sept. 1966) and Charles Tilly, "Clio and Minerva," in John C. McKinney and Edward Tiryakian (eds.) *Theoretical Sociology: Perspectives and Developments* (New York, 1968).

In the areas of graduate training and research, there is a great deal which humanities and social science departments could do to foster mutal understanding and co-operation at the graduate level. The need is not for new, costly, and wasteful departmental arrangments–these would merely add competing structures to a system already overloaded with them–but for existing faculties to provide courses, seminars, and above all, informal research orientation for graduate students who are *not* registered there. At the same time there is a need for more faculty seminars in order to provide a candid discussion of methodological problems and mature research questions. These two innovations, already being practiced in several universities, would inevitably make departmental management more complicated; but they might also achieve the much needed goal of separating programming from research. All too often a student nowadays ends up doing research in an area marginal to his previous programming, and does not consult experts outside his area of specialization before beginning his project. Thus he inadvertently perpetuates the romantic myth that the lone scholar is capable of carrying on his own work in a vacuum. It would be more accurate to state that a researcher on a major historical subject who does not go beyond his basic discipline may not even be capable of asking meaningful questions. In some cases, acquaintance with other fields would lead a humanities student to adopt the method of team research, now commonly employed in the sciences and social sciences but still spurned by historians. In other cases, the graduate student would at least have his own conceptions openly debated, confronted, and perhaps rejected by experts in other areas. Today, in contrast, the departmental system shields the graduate student from outside criticism concerning methodology until his initiation rites are concluded.

The adaptation of a variety of social science techniques to historical research would have the added benefit of bringing philological-historical work within a framework of ideas understandable to modern society, which is, after all, providing the funds for it. This does not mean that historical research should become "mod" in a vulgar sense. We have unhappy examples of this trend in works of popular consumption and their effect on serious historians has been, in general, to harden their resistance to the use of the social sciences, which they associate with superficiality and inaccuracy. What is needed is the opposite: research which is in the broadest sense sociological-historical. Thought on these questions moreover should be directed towards experimenting with new programmes in classics and medieval studies. Those now in operation might serve as a basis for comparison. To cite a single, arbitrary example from among many, one of the most successful in recent years has been the VIe Section of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris. In 1947 this famous graduate school opened a new department devoted to economics and sociology, but with a strong emphasis on historical studies. Their work has been so successful that they have exerted a large influence on the overall intellectual life of France since the war. There may be other, equally successful examples closer to home, but mentioning them might simply incite invidious comparisons. In any case, the point should now be clear. As a methodology in classics and medieval studies which has long

occupied a position of unchallenged hegemony, philology must now adapt to new needs and circumstances which involve the social sciences. If she refuses to do so, she may lose that most precious resource of the graduate school, the quest for intellectual freedom which led Friedrich Wolf to introduce her into the university in the first place. To cite a late classical myth, *Philologia* appears to be in need of a bridegroom. Why not find her a new Mercury?